

Broken Wings by xanaphorax

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Summary: Nothing in your life has ever been normal. From your birth, to discovering there was another dimension that produced monsters, to your dad adopting a telekinetic sister. It only made sense that this would extend to your relationship (or whatever it is you'd call it) with that asshole Billy Hargrove.

Broken Wings

(Chapter 1) On-Duty

Author's Note:: I've been playing the idea of Billy getting involved with the Hopper family for a while now, and this is the product of that. I'd be interested to see what you think of this first chapter in terms of the main character's back story and any sort of characterization you gather from it. Enjoy!

I never had the luxury of a normal life.

From the moment I was conceived, circumstances with my family had been...different. My parents met at a party. More specifically, my dad and his buddies' last hoorah before they got shipped over to Vietnam. Mom came as a friend of a friend of one of my dad's buddies because she was a bit of a party girl back then. Dad once let slip—while very drunk—that Mom considered it an act of patriotism what led them together; it was a service to her country to slip away with the attractive young enlisted man.

This red, white, and blue spirit wore off about a month later when my mother found, well, me.

The story gets a little hazy there. All my parents admit to is that letters were exchanged and decisions were made. When my dad came back, the two of them reconnected and got to know each other. Then he got to know me. A couple of years later, those crazy kids got married, signed some papers, and we were all officially Hoppers. Dad liked to say it was a testament to how, no matter how messed up things may be, they tended to work themselves out.

I was six when my parents announced that I was going to be a big sister.

I was seven when I found out what that really meant.

It was in the hospital waiting room, my dad and I sitting there together as my grandmother stayed with my mom. He had pulled me

over to stand in front of his chair and took both of my hands in both of his. "Do you know what it means to be a Hopper, Hannah?" he had asked, looking me in the eyes. Of course I didn't. I was seven. I shook my head, and I remember the soft smile he gave me. "Being a Hopper means you're always the one to step up." I gave a nod, but I must have had a blank look on my face because my dad immediately followed it up with "Do you know what that means?"

"Kind of," I drew out the words, hating to admit that I didn't know something.

"It means that when you notice someone needs help, you don't wait to be asked, you go help them. And you don't give them *enough* help. You go above and beyond. You do whatever you can. Until they're good." I nodded again, and satisfied, my dad had squeezed my hands.

"What if they don't want help?" The question had bubbled out of me in the way questions always did at that age. The thought had barely crossed my mind before it was out of my mouth. Dad moved back in his seat a little and looked me up and down. And then, almost in slow motion, his lips curled up into a smile.

"Well, Hannah," he said, leaning even closer to me. "The other thing about Hoppers, is we don't give up. Even if we should." I smiled back at him, convinced that if I couldn't do anything else, I had that part of being a Hopper down. He shook my hands twice, in the way he did, before releasing them. "I want you to know this because when the baby's born, you go on-duty. As the big sister, you have to show the baby what it means to be a Hopper. Think you can do that?"

He got another nod from me, and he smiled, leaning forward to kiss my forehead. Shortly after, my new sister was born, and I was officially on-duty.

I felt as if I was born to be a big sister. Something about the added responsibility—of knowing that my existence *mattered*—was exhilarating. Of course, back then I never would have explained it in such ways. Instead, whenever I got a compliment from a lady at a grocery store or a neighbor about how I was "such a good big sister," I would beam up at them and say, "I'm a Hopper!" They would laugh lightly and pinch my cheek or pat the top of my head. I'm sure half of

them thought I meant to say "helper."

They were the same thing in my book. I made my own breakfast—cereal, every day. I set and cleared the table for my parents. I put myself to bed at night and let my parents know they could come tuck me in. In the morning, I made my bed. When Sara cried, I tried distracting her with toys. As she got older, I played peek-a-boo with her and tried teaching her nursery rhymes (despite my parents insistence that babies couldn't understand the rhymes.) By the time Sara was four, I was routinely sneaking out of my bed and into hers so I could read her extra bedtime stories.

And then, at eleven, my parents made the second announcement that changed my life.

Starting middle school should have been my biggest worry. Instead, it was whose house I was going to after school. I had sleepover after sleepover, and when that became too wearing for my friends' families, it was babysitter after babysitter as my parents took Sara to her different hospital appointments. And then, instead of the three of them going to the hospital to visit the doctors, it became the three of us going to the hospital to visit Sara. And one day, instead of the hospital, it was the graveyard.

Life was different after Sara. My father never pulled me aside and sat me down to explain what it meant now that I was off-duty. There was no explanation of how I could expect my life to change now that I was no longer a sister. I had a feeling that the rules no longer applied, but like a true Hopper, I refused to give them up.

Even though I probably should have.

My parents seemed to give up on their rules.

Dad was falling apart. It was all he could do to ask how my day at school was and share a small tidbit of his work happenings before he sat himself down in his chair with a bottle of beer or a glass of something dark and listened to his records for the rest of the night.

Mom was never home. She disappeared for days at a time to be with her friends or relatives or somewhere else. It was probably because

she found it hard to look at me. I had the same blonde hair. The same blue eyes. It wasn't until I came home early—on time, really—from school one day that I heard why.

I can still see her in the kitchen, sitting on the floor with her back against the wall. The phone was stretched down to her, and she was crying into it, mascara leaving dark rings around her eyes. "Jim's always on me about how I'm not spending enough time with Hannah, but I'm the one who's dragging him to bed drunk. And Hannah always needs me to sign a permission slip or is asking me what's for dinner," she sniffled, wiping at her eyes and smudging her makeup further. "It's like they're suffocating me. And this house...this house is like a mausoleum. It's just full of dead people. I can't be here anymore." She shook her head, dissolving into tears. I crept past her and locked myself away from my room and decided it was time to step up.

I started making breakfast, lunch, and basic dinners. At first, I sort of made a big show out of it so my mom knew she didn't have to make dinner anymore. It didn't take too long to pick up on the fact that she wouldn't make dinner unless asked.

It wasn't long after I started cooking for myself and forging my mom's signature that she officially moved out.

One day I came home, and she was gone, leaving behind only a letter to Dad. Curiosity got the better of me, as it usually does, and I read it. It was angry, bitter, heartbreaking, and unfair. I had been given a single line of thought.

Tell Hannah I'm sorry.

While it's dulled some, my whole body seems to ache whenever I think about those words. For the first four years of my life it had been just me and Mom. Even though I hardly remembered that time, I'd assumed it would have meant something to her. But when Sara died, it was as if she took me with her.

After reading the letter, Dad took down a half-drunk bottle of bourbon, went into his room, closed the door, and put a Jim Croce album on. I went to his door to try to talk to him, but I couldn't bring

myself to even knock. Not when I heard him crying over the sounds of "I Got a Name." Instead, I slid down the door the same way my mother slid down that kitchen wall and cried with him.

I was too sick to go to school the next day.

When the papers were signed, I was thirteen. It was a month after the divorce was finalized that dad packed us up and so we could move back to his hometown of Hawkins, Indiana. At first I missed the big city feel and my friends from my old school, but things got a little better when I met Jonathan Byers. We became fast friends. Not the kind of friends where we went over each other's houses or hung out on the weekend or that I even talked about to my dad. No, we were the kind of friends who sat with each other at lunch so we didn't have to sit alone.

But then I left for high school, and Jonathan stayed behind, and I made new friends and shifted into a normal life. And in Hawkins, normal life meant dealing with an alcoholic and absentee father. Gone were the days of walking in the park with Sara and my parents. Instead, I went to school, got involved with after school clubs, came home to take care of my father (if he was home), and snuck out later at night to meet up with whatever boy I was currently seeing. This was what it meant to be a normal teenager. And it was fine. Everything was fine.

Until junior year.

When Will Byers went missing, everything changed. And that's not just because Hawkins practically went on shut down because everybody was freaking out over a missing kid.

It was because Dad stopped drinking.

And I reconnected with Jonathan after stepping up to help him find his brother.

And, oh yeah, turns out there's another dimension that monsters can crawl through to eat people.

My world became a lot smaller that year. In a good way. It was

almost as if all of the extraneous people who had been walking in and out of my life just disappeared and all that was left was who really mattered: My dad. The Byers. Nancy Wheeler. El. The four goons. And, to some extent, Steve Harrington, who had saved my life.

I never had the luxury of a normal life.

But I had the luxury of being a Hopper, and when Dad opened the door to our new home, my great-grandfather's cabin in the woods, and I saw El sitting in the dark, alone on the dusty old couch, I knew that was something she could use too.

And I was on-duty.